

Testimony of Leslie Sousa, East Hartford Paraprofessional

Labor and Public Employees Committee

March 1, 2012

S.B. 150 AN ACT CONCERNING FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES

I hope to express the importance of lowering the amount of hours needed to qualify for F.M.L.A. As a para I can only work for a school year. This is 182 days. In that time I may not reach the required 1250 hours needed to obtain F.M.L.A. benefits. I cannot receive unemployment benefits during the time off and I work another job for the summer to supplement my income. This has affected me and I would like to tell you my story.

During my Christmas break two years ago, I fell and severely broke my ankle. I had surgery and was very limited in what I was allowed to do for over three months. I ran out of sick days from February 13- March 24, 2009. As soon as I ran out of sick time I was sent a bill from my administration that I would have to pay \$2,168.40, my required 75% portion of my medical benefits, for this approved unpaid sick leave. If I didn't pay by the fifteenth of March they would cancel my insurance. I was so overwhelmed by this bill that I took out a loan from a bank. I could not go without benefits. Eventually, my union was able to establish a sick bank for me. My co-workers were allowed, per our Board Of Education's approval, to donate their sick time to me. As long as I had sick days, whether mine or donated, the administration told me I did not have to pay 75% for my benefits. I was able to return the check to my bank.

When someone is faced with a difficult health issue they shouldn't have to be at the mercy of an administration's interpretation of a contract. If we had a law that supported all of us who do not reach the 1,250 hours required every year to obtain F.M.L.A., it would eliminate a lot of the uncertainty of whether you can afford your benefits or, in some cases, have a job to return to.

With respect,

Leslie Sousa, paraprofessional

East Hartford High School